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ABSTRACT

This study asked preservice and inservice teachers about their views on the characteristics of an effective teacher and sought to discern whether the gender of the participants influenced the responses. In Fall and Spring semesters, 1993-1994, undergraduates (preservice) education students and graduate students (most were inservice teachers) attending a regional university were asked to write free responses for characteristics of good/effective teachers. They were asked to use one-word concepts if possible. Of 395 participants, 106 were male and 289 were female. Analysis revealed gender differences as well as differences between graduate and undergraduate students in the responses. By far, the most important characteristic in a good/effective teacher, as cited by undergraduate students, was understanding. The most important characteristic, as cited by gradate students was caring. Females, more than males, would like to see teachers show understanding, enthusiasm, creativity, and organization. Males would like to see teachers show fairness, good communication, responsibility, and humor. In addition the results suggested that teachers' personality characteristics were related to their perceived effectiveness, and that perceived personality traits may be as important as technical skills. Also, teacher characteristics appeared, paradoxically, to be independent of the quality of instruction. (Contains 37 references.) (JB)

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CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD/EFFECTIVE TEACHERS: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT DESCRIPTORS

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CHARACTERISTICS OF GOOD/EFFECTIVE TEACHERS: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN STUDENT DESCRIPTORS

What constitutes good or effective teaching has been discussed a good while. Previous research has indicated that a number of factors are related to student evaluations of teaching effectiveness. These range from teachers' personal characteristics (Murray, Rushton & Paunonen, 1990), to actual teacher effectiveness in general (Henjum, 1983), and to actual teacher effectiveness in specific academic areas (Ouzts, 1982). What characteristics do good/effective teachers exhibit, according to students? To what extent does gender of student affect the selection of these teacher characteristics?

Numerous studies have cited the effects of gender on teacher ratings. It appears there is an interaction between gender of the student and gender of the instructor. Since student ratings are often accepted at face value without consideration of other factors that might influence the ratings, being male or female may make a difference.

GENDER EFFECTS

Ratings of instructors vary by gender. Some studies find that female instructors are rated higher than male instructors (Costin et al., 1971), with others finding that female instructors are rated lower than male instructors (D'Agostino and Dill 1988; Basow & Howe, 1987; Basow & Silberg, 1987; Bernard et al., 1981; Harris, 1976; Goldberg, 1968). Others report that female faculty receive higher ratings from male students but significantly lower ratings from female students, with the opposite occurring for male faculty (Tieman and Rankin-Ullock, 1985). In

general, male instructors appear to be rated higher than female teachers, and the bias appears to be because of gender. Kaschak (1976) found both male and female students rated female professors lower on qualities of power and excellence than they did male professors. Still other studies indicate no difference (Basow & Distenfeld, 1985; Bennett, 1982; Elmore & LaPointe, 1975).

Other gender effects have been found which are puzzling. Brooks (1982) found in mixed classes of graduate students that male students tend to be more aggressive when the class is taught by a female instructor. Male students speak longer and more frequently than female students, and also interrupt the female students and the female professor more than they do when the class is taught by a male. Butler and Geis (1990) found that in mixed groups of men and women, both are more likely to respond to women leaders with scowls and frowns while nodding and smiling at male leaders who make the identical statements. Rubin (1981) even found female professors consistently given less status than their male counterparts in modes of address. Both male and female students tend to address female faculty, more than male faculty, by using non-professional titles (Miss, Mrs., Ms.) and by first names. Female students are apparently more prone to do this than male students. Teacher attractiveness also is involved. Regardless of sex, an attractive instructor is apparently perceived as a better instructor (Lombardo and Tocci, 1979).

EXPECTATIONS

Apparently students expect certain behavior from teachers, depending on their gender. Studies like the one by Rakow (1991) indicate that women teaching at the college level may transgress gender-role expectations by assuming a non-traditional role for women. Female instructors apparently are expected to conform to stereotypical, culturally accepted behaviors, and

if they fail to conform, may end up with negative student ratings. There is evidence that female professors receive higher ratings in traditionally female disciplines (e.g., home economics) versus females in traditionally male disciplines like physics and engineering (Goodwin and Stevens, 1993). However, the study by Tieman and Rankin-Ullock (1985) suggests that teachers in non-traditional career areas (e.g., men in liberal arts and women in business) may receive higher ratings because they have succeeded in unexpected areas, based on their gender. Apparently the perception of talent overrides normal gender expectations.

Female teachers are apparently expected to exude more warmth and nurturing qualities, yet at the same time such behavior may be interpreted as weakness, perhaps interpreted as "feminine" (Zigmund, 1988). However, if a female faculty member acts in a strong and assertive manner (like male colleagues) she may be viewed as "too masculine." It appears female behavior isn't quite right, no matter what it is. Strong female faculty members may be seen as rigid and controlling rather than intellectually rigorous and challenging (Basow & Silberg, 1987).

Bennett (1982) found that female instructors were perceived as warmer within the classroom. The students also expected and demanded a great deal more accessibility from female teachers than from male teachers. Even though female faculty apparently spend more time with students than male faculty, females are rated as being less available than men (Sandler, 1991). Male teachers, on the other hand seem to be judged independently of students' access to them. Bennett (1982) suggests that males who do offer greater attention and time to students aren't necessarily appreciated. The key appears to be how free the student feels to approach the teacher, regardless of the degree to which they have actually turned to him for assistance or support.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

In a previous paper, Chapman and Ogden (1994) summarized some effective teacher characteristics which have been cited in the literature.

GARCIA (1991): adaptable, caring, collaborative, committed, confident, creative, dedicated, demanding, energetic, knowledgeable, persistent, resourceful (Elementary)

GOODWIN & STEVENS (1993): enthusiastic, knowledgeable (College)

HENJUM (1983): emotionally stable, enthusiastic, motivated, participating, self-assured, strong will power, unfrustrated, venturesome (K-12)

LANG, McKEE & CONNER (1992): challenging, communicator, encouraging, flexible, friendly, knowledgeable, prompt (College)

MURRAY, RUSHTON & PAUNONEN (1990): extraversion, leadership, liberalism, seeks definiteness, supporting (College)

MARSH (1991): enthusiastic, organized (College)

OUTZS (1982): confident, dedicated, enthusiastic, intelligent, knowledgeable, organized, optimistic, patient, sensitive (High School)

WEAVER, WENZIAFF & COTRELL (1993): challenging, communicator, enthusiastic, humorous, listener, tolerant (College)

SHERMAN, ARMISTEAD, FOWLER, BARKSDALE & REIF (1987): enthusiasm, knowledge, clarity, preparation & organization, stimulating interest, experience

WOOLFOLK (1993): clarity, enthusiastic, knowledge, organized (K-12)

Given this sampling of characteristics of effective teachers, what correspondence occurs in characteristics cited by preservice and inservice teachers?

METHOD

At the beginning of the Fall and Spring semesters, 1993-94, undergraduate (preservice) education students and graduate students (most being inservice teachers) attending a regional university were asked to write free responses for characteristics of good/effective teachers. They were asked to use one-word concepts if possible. The breakdown by gender by academic status of the participants is as follows:

Undergraduate males	67	
Graduate males	39	106
Undergraduate females	157	
Graduate females	132	289
Total Subjects	395	395

The responses used were the first three given by each participant. It was assumed that the first characteristics listed were primary in the students' minds. Each characteristic was assigned three points if it was listed first, two points if it was listed second, and one point if it was

listed third. Characteristics listed by only a few students were not included.

Table 1 shows the total number of times each concept was listed. A few terms were collapsed into a superordinate category; for example, the concepts of nice, considerate, friendly, helpful were collapsed into the superordinate concept of "caring." A total of 20 primary concepts listed by the students were collapsed into the table of thirteen. The three characteristics listed most were: understanding, caring, and knowledge, respectively.

Table 2 indicates the total number of points assigned to the concept by its priority given in the lists by the students. For undergraduate females the concept of understanding was by far the leader in points, followed by caring and knowledge. However, the concept of caring had the most points, followed by understanding and then knowledge for undergraduate males and graduate females. Graduate males weighted caring with the most points, then knowledge, then understanding. When total point weight is considered, the concept of understanding carries the most points, followed closely by caring, and knowledge is a distant third for females. For males, caring totaled the most weight, followed by understanding and knowledge.

Table 3 is a bar graph constructed by taking the total points per characteristic and converting the points to percentages. The graph compares male and female responses for each of the concepts. Gender differences exist on some characteristics such as understanding, enthusiasm, fair, knowledge, communication. Females, more than males, would like to see teachers show understamdomg, enthusiasm, creativity, and organization. Males, more than females, would like to see these characteristics in teachers: fair, communicates well, responsible, and humorous. Some characteristics were listed by undergraduates but not graduates (and more by females than males). These were: interesting, creative, firm, communicates well, and responsible. Graduates also listed some that were not given by undergraduates (and again, more by females than males).

These were: flexible, and organized (prepared).

In summary, gender differences appeared as well as differences between graduate-undergraduate students in the responses. By far, the most important characteristic in a good/effective teacher, as cited by undergraduate students, is understanding. The most important characteristic, as cited by graduate students, is caring.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Based on characteristics cited by preservice and inservice students in this study, teachers are appreciated for, and probably evaluated by a number of humanistic characteristics (e.g., understanding, caring, humor, etc.) that are non-teaching factors, per se.

2. There apparently exists a "student expectancy effect." Students who have strong expectations of certain teacher characteristics may evaluate their teachers on the perceived degree of the teacher's conformity to the expectation, rather than the actual characteristics of the teacher.

3. Apparently teachers' personality characteristics are related to their perceived effectiveness. Perceived personality traits of teachers (interpersonal skills) may be as important to students as technical skills.

4. Teacher characteristics appear to paradoxically be independent of the quality of instruction, yet because of cognitive association, are probably merged by students into the overall assessment of the teacher. Thus, the students' perception of the personality, sex, style, etc., of the teacher is probably intertwined with course content.

5. Humanistic factors such as understanding, caring, etc., may be sought more by students than technical factors such as organization and high grading standards, etc.

6. Questions asked of students in evaluating teachers and courses may need to be re-thought.

7. Students may be judging male and female professors/teachers on various issues, some of which may have nothing to do with teaching competence.

8. Since differences were found in this study between undergraduate and graduate responses, age of students may be a factor in teacher evaluation.

9. Gender and academic level apparently both influence students' perceptions of good/effective teachers.

10. When students evaluate teachers, there may be an interaction between the sex of the student and the sex of the teacher, as well as some other variables.

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TABLE 1

Total Number of Responses

	Undergraduate Female		Undergraduate Male		Graduate Female		Graduate Male		Total Female		Total Male	
Characteristics	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Understanding (patient)	102	33%	24	25%	54	25%	5	10%	156	30%	29	20%
Caring (nice, considerate, friendly, helpful)	90	29%	28	29%	74	34%	22	46%	164	31%	50	35%
Knowledge	45	15%	18	19%	35	16%	8	17%	80	15%	26	18%
Interesting	21	7%	6	6%		0%		0%	21	4%	6	4%
Enthusiastic	19	6%		0%	13	6%		0%	32	6%	0	0%
Fair (consistent)	13	4%	10	10%	10	5%	4	8%	23	4%	14	10%
Creative	10	3%		0%		0%		0%	10	2%	0	0%
Firm	10	3%		0%		0%		0%	10	2%	0	0%
Communicates well		0%	5	5%		0%		0%	0	0%	5	3%
Responsible		0%	5	5%		0%		0%	0	0%	5	3%
Flexible		0%		0%	17	8%	3	6%	17	3%	3	2%
Organized (prepared)		0%		0%	12	6%		0%	12	2%	0	0%
Humorous		0%		0%		0%	6	13%	0	0%	6	4%
Total	310		96		215		48		525		144	

TABLE 2

Total Points Per Characteristic

	Undergraduate Female	Undergraduate Male	Undergraduate Total		Graduate Female	Graduate Male	Graduate Total		Total Female		Total Male	
Characteristics	Pts.	Pts.	Pts.	%	Pts.	Pts.	Pts.	%	Pts.	%	Pts.	%
Understanding (patient)	240	57	297	33%	130	13	143	25%	370	33%	70	21%
Caring (nice, considerate, friendly, helpful)	208	73	281	31%	158	43	201	36%	366	32%	116	35%
Knowledge	82	41	123	14%	60	15	75	13%	142	13%	56	17%
Interesting	38	13	51	6%			0	0%	38	3%	13	4%
Enthusiastic	37		37	4%	29		29	5%	66	6%	0	0%
Fair (consistent)	25	25	50	6%	19	12	31	5%	44	4%	37	11%
Creative	21		21	2%			0	0%	21	2%	0	0%
Firm	15		15	2%			0	0%	15	1%	0	0%
Communicates well		10	10	1%			0	0%	0	0%	10	3%
Responsible		8	8	1%			0	0%	0	0%	8	2%
Flexible			0	0%	35	9	44	8%	35	3%	9	3%
Organized (prepared)			0	0%	33		33	6%	33	3%	0	0%
Humorous			0	0%		8	8	1%	0	0%	8	2%
Total	666	227	893		464	100	564		1130		327	

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TABLE 3

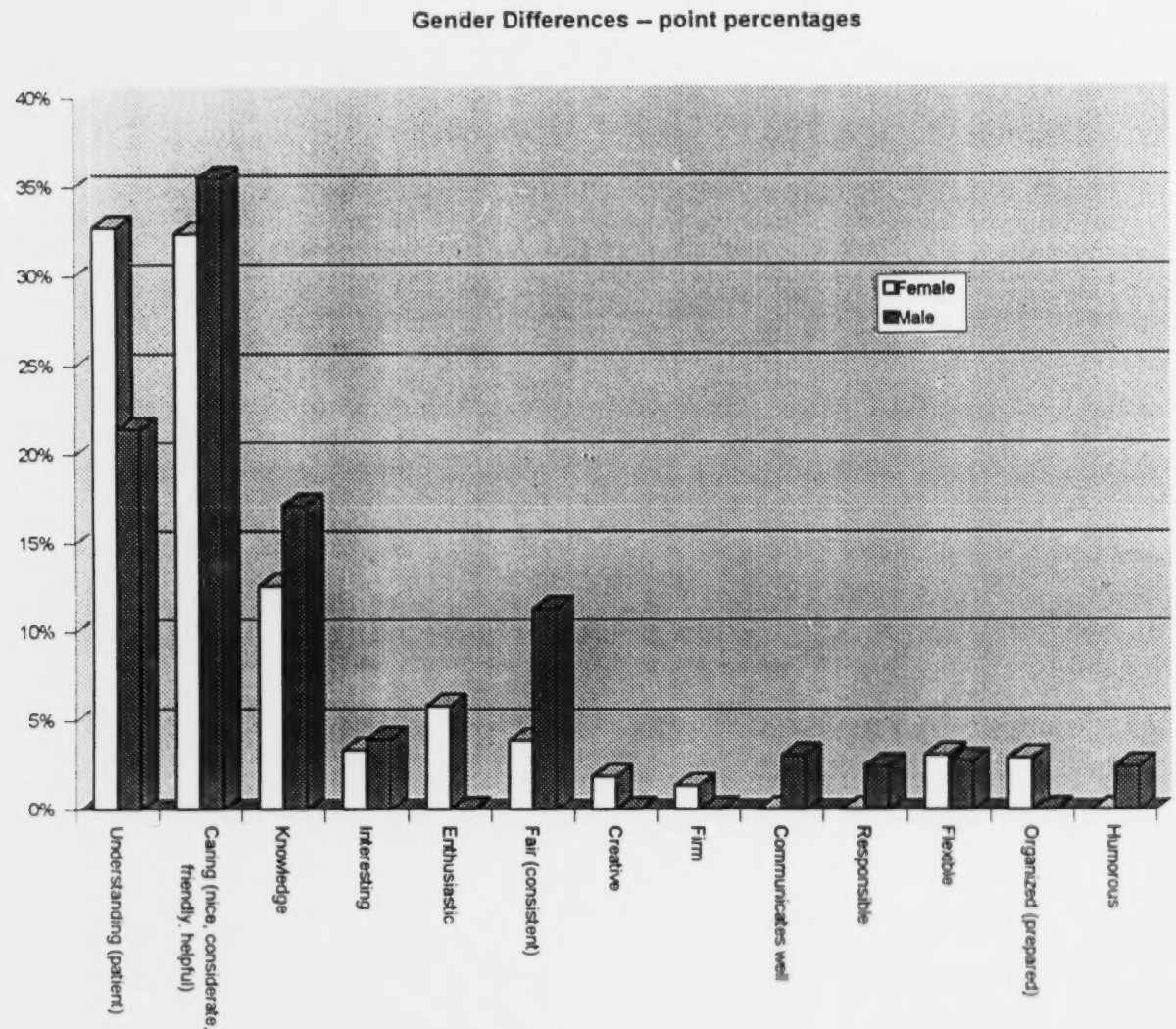
Gender Differences -- point percentages
40%
35%
30%
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
Female
Male
Understanding (patient)
Caring (nice, considerate, friendly, helpful)
Knowledge
Interesting
Enthusiastic
Fair (consistent)
Creative
Firm
Communicates well
Responsible
Flexible
Organized (prepared)
Humorous

TABLE 4

Response Percentages